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# The Shuffled Letter in Raymond Carver's "Collectors"

Vasiliki Fachard

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"La création poétique—c'est la création de  
l'attente."

(Paul Valéry Cahiers II, 11)

"... authors, as a rule, hide the labour of their  
creations."

(Luigi Pirandello 268)

- 1 "The telephone rang while he was running the vacuum cleaner." Interrupted by the telephone in the act of vacuuming his apartment, Myers first strikes the reader as another Carver character out of work in the above opening sentence of "Put Yourself In My Shoes," a story from Raymond Carver's first collection entitled *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*:

He stopped and listened and then switched off the vacuum. He went to answer the telephone.

'Hello,' he said. 'Myers here.'

'Myers,' she said. 'How are you? What are you doing?'

'Nothing,' he said. 'Hello, Paula.'

- 2 The greetings exchanged between the two characters hardly indicate to the reader that the woman who addresses Myers with what sounds like a last name and to whom he responds with a cordial "Hello, Paula" is his wife. His aloofness and general coldness—reinforced by freezing weather throughout the story—are in part explained by the fact that Myers is going through a writer's block: "He was between stories and he felt despicable." Simultaneously, however, the remoteness between them points to a sub-text in which the mimetic pair of husband and wife veils another kind of dyad: that of a writer and his 'distant muse,' stripped though she is of the romantic trappings of one. It is Paula who will coax Myers out of their house, where he is doing "nothing," and to the house of the Morgans. There, following a series of conflicts mainly provoked by Myers's insolent behaviour toward a professor of literature, he will manage to overcome his writer's block

and reverse the initial situation in the closing lines of the story: "He was silent and watched the road. He was at the end of a story."

- 3 Dovetailing with Myers's "end of a story," therefore, is the bigger narrative of "Put Yourself in My Shoes," the story of its making. Steering its movement was a division necessary for the writer's reflection on his process—or for reflection *tout court* according to Paul Valéry: *La pensée exige une division interne—et que le même puisse s'opposer au même—déguisant la même énergie en plusieurs personnes*, "Reflection demands an inner division—and that the same might oppose itself to the same—disguising the same energy into several persons" (I, 1029, my translation). "At the end of" his/her retroactive reading, the reader has thus intimated that Myers's collision with Morgan was essential in making him conscious of his own polarisation: part of him clinging to a past narrative tradition the academic gives voice to and another needing to dislodge himself from it in order to break new grounds. The "fat" ("Fat")<sup>1</sup> sub-text of "Put Yourself In My Shoes," consequently, is about the distance in time and space that Myers takes from his own realist self, a "process" which for Carver is organically linked to the indeterminacy of his own fiction:

I like to mess around with my stories. I'd rather tinker with a story after writing it, and then tinker some more, changing this, changing that, than have to write the story in the first place... Rewriting for me is not a chore—it's something I like to do... Maybe I revise because it gradually takes me into the heart of what the story is about. I have to keep trying to see if I can find that out. It's a process more than a fixed position. (*Fires* 218)

- 4 To view a story as "process" is to see it atomised, its parts seeking to fuse with parts of other stories in a "maze" ("Cathedral") of "connections"<sup>2</sup> through which all of Carver's narratives intersect with one another, one never quite coming to a close without some of its "stitches" ("After the Denim") resurfacing in other stories or constituting a new story's beginning.<sup>3</sup> Given the permeability of its mimetic confines, the inactivity in which Myers is depicted at the beginning of "Put Yourself In My Shoes," as well as the vacuum cleaner itself, serve a similar function of connecting it to a segment of preceding stories and, consequently, throwing light on the hidden occupation of the respective male characters whose analogous state of inertia veils *their* writer's block as well. Thus, in "What Do You Do In San Francisco" two stories earlier, Marston does nothing all day but wait for the mailman. In "Collectors," the story preceding the above, the protagonist presumably named Slater is presented in an analogous state of anticipatory waiting:

I was out of work. But any day I expected to hear from up north. I lay on the sofa and listened to the rain. Now and then I'd lift up and look through the curtain for the mailman.

- 5 Instead of the "mailman" Slater is expecting, however, he receives an overzealous vacuum cleaner salesman one day named Bell who offers to vacuum his whole house with an assiduousness that defies mimetic understanding. In fact, the zeal with which he vacuums every nook and cranny of Slater's house borders on the absurd, especially when he persists in offering his demonstration of a shampoo in the absence of Mrs. Slater, the actual "winner" of the prize:

Aubrey Bell, he said.  
I don't know you, I said.  
Mrs. Slater, he read. Two-fifty-five South Sixth East? Mrs. Slater is a winner....  
Mrs. Slater doesn't live here, I said. What'd she win?  
I have to show you, he said. May I come in?  
I don't know. If it won't take long, I said. I'm pretty busy.

- 6 In spite of the latter's reticence, Bell, nevertheless, "stepped out of the galoshes and into the room in a pair of slippers." Such "intimacy" ("Intimacy")<sup>4</sup> hardly coheres with an unwelcome salesman any more than do the literary allusions that follow:

He saw me staring at the slippers and said, W. H. Auden wore slippers all through China on his first visit there.

Rilke lived in one castle after another, all of his adult life... Then look at Voltaire at Cirey with Madame Châtelet. His death mask...

- 7 If the salesman's interest in literature is completely out of character, it is merely one out of a host of mimetic inconsistencies which point to his function in a sub-text about literature rather than selling.<sup>5</sup> Unfettered by mimetic demands for closure, the above sub-text is itself part of a larger hypo-mimetic territory in which the three stories conflate in a broken "sequence"<sup>6</sup> that fractures a single writer in time, each presenting him in a different phase of the same writing process. Held together by an inactivity or waiting which the respective writers share, the three narratives simultaneously come apart through differences which determine the mimetic singularity of each. Thus, if all three men are "out of work," only Slater and Marston couple through the "mailman" both are expecting, whereas Myers and Slater connect through the presence of an ordinary object of American reality: a vacuum cleaner.

- 8 Broken in time, the writer is equally broken within the space of each narrative, undergoing a *dédoublement* or halving that self-knowledge (inseparable from knowledge of his craft) demands. As Slater's other half, therefore, Bell will act as a mentor of sorts, initiating him to a process in which the vacuum cleaner becomes metonymic of collecting "material" for a story, narrative material that is referential to a writer's life:

Every day, every night of our lives, we're leaving little bits of ourselves, flakes of this and that, behind. Where do they go, these bits and pieces of ourselves? Right through the sheets and into the mattress, *that's where!* Pillows, too...

- 9 It is in a similar metafictional context that the "churchly voice" in which Bell displays the parts of the appliance to his other half coheres with what he views as the *rite* or *mystery* of writing rather than the gadgetry of a household object:

The case flopped open, revealing compartments filled with an array of hoses, brushes, shiny pipes, and some kind of heavy-looking blue thing mounted on little wheels. He stared at these things as if surprised. Quietly, *in a churchly voice*, he said, Do you know what this is?

I moved closer. I'd say it was a vacuum cleaner. (emphasis added)

- 10 Bell will proceed to demonstrate the mechanism and functioning of the "hose" and "pipes" that "suction," "scoop" up and "filter" the "material" or "stuff" that will ultimately be given life in a story:

He checked the suction again, then extended the hose to the head of the bed and began to move the scoop down the mattress. The scoop tugged at the mattress. The vacuum whirled louder. He made three passes over the mattress, then switched off the machine. He pressed a lever and the lid popped open. He took out the filter... In normal use, all of this, this *material*, would go into your bag, here, he said. He pinched some of the dusty stuff between his fingers.

- 11 Implicit in his function as mentor of the collecting process is the necessity for Bell to defer writing by preventing Slater from rushing prematurely to pick up the first letter of his story. As his name suggests, it is he who will give the signal or "bell" to begin. It is not an epistle, in other words, that best coheres with the "letter" that drops in the slot while

Bell is vacuuming but a typographical character<sup>7</sup> that he cannot yet use, for his story must gestate some more:

I heard steps on the porch, the mail slot opened and clinked shut. We looked at each other. He pulled on the vacuum and I followed him into the other room. We looked at the letter lying face down on the carpet near the front door.

I started toward the letter, turned and said, What else? It's getting late. This carpet's not worth fooling with. It's only a twelve-by-fifteen cotton carpet with no-skid backing from Rug City. It's not worth fooling with.

- 12 When one man is impatient to start with his story, the other will draw out a phase which he knows has not yet come to its end: "Do you have a full ashtray? [Bell] said. Or a potted plant or something like that?" The cigarette ashes and dirt which Bell subsequently "dumped" on the carpet, are also, his gesture tells us, "worth fooling with," for as "material" from the writer's life they also have the potential to come "alive" in a story to come:

He adjusted his dial. He kicked on the machine and began to move back and forth, back and forth over the worn carpet. Twice I started for the letter. But he seemed to anticipate me, cut me off, so to speak, with his hose and his pipes and his sweeping and his sweeping... After a time he shut off the machine, opened the lid, and silently brought me the filter, *alive* with dust, hair, small grainy things. (emphasis added)

- 13 "Start[ing] for the letter" and being "cut off" are two oppositional forces within a writer in whom the urge to begin is being checked by a counter force, his steps toward it neutralised by the ones Bell takes to prevent him from reaching it. More "sweeping and sweeping" is needed to organise and order—with his "hose and... pipes"—the "stuff" found in his unconscious.
- 14 Deferral of the above process, finally, is also encrypted in the choice of "Slater" for a name that is mimetically dysfunctional, for it never fixes the identity of a character as realistic convention demands:

I have something for Mrs. Slater. She's won something. Is Mrs. Slater home?

Mrs. Slater doesn't live here, I said.

Well, then, are you Mr. Slater? the man said. Mr. Slater . . . and the man sneezed.

- 15 Against the reader's expectations, Bell will not resume his question after the sneeze but resign himself to addressing him as "Mr. ..." for the remainder of the visit. The absence of any confirmation from his host that he is Mr. Slater or Mrs. Slater's husband, in other words, will not deter him from proceeding with his demonstration, as if the identity of the "winner" was not at all important. And, in the metafictional sub-text, it is not, for there the name is reduced to the phonetic and/or scriptural function we see it has when it is mysteriously "hissed" by Bell after his host offers him aspirin for his cold:

Here, I said. Then I think you ought to leave.

Are you speaking for Mrs. Slater? he hissed. No, no, forget I said that, forget I said that.

- 16 In what appears more and more as a parody of a 'mystery story,' Bell's uncalled-for hissing may have given the reader a clue for decoding the 'mystery' of an unacknowledged name. For if we cannot yet fathom why Bell wishes him to "forget" what he said, we cannot have failed to hear that the hissing or *sibilation* of the letter 's' in "Mrs. Slater" (Mr/SSSSS/later) exaggerates its prominence to the point of unhitching it from its neighboring letters, thus splicing the name *graphically* into smaller semantic units—not the least significant of which is the word 'later'. The atomisation of the name prompts the

reader to "regard" ("Feathers") such broken parts as "signs" ("Vitamins") waiting to be re-arranged or, possibly, "shuffled" in the manner Bell does with the cards he carries in "an inside pocket" and among which is also the one containing Mrs. Slater's name and address: "Mrs. Slater, he began. Mrs. Slater filled out a card. He took cards from an inside pocket and shuffled them a minute." An analogous shuffling of the nodal 's' by the reader can result in a shifting signifier (Mr. or Mrs.) combining respectively with 'later': Mr/sSlater, Mrss/later. Mr. S-later, as we will refer to the protagonist in these lines, thus serves as indicator of a writer's function (as opposed to identity) during the phase of collecting: defer until *later* the writing of a story he is itching to bring "out in the open."

- 17 By decomposing the name, "Collectors" has thus subverted a fundamental tenet of realism: that which makes it adhere to a character, thereby fixing his/her identity. The fictionality inherent in such a convention is refuted in the new narrative, where a *character* is first of all the result of a writer's χαραττειν (the etymological root of 'character') or mere tracing of typographical *characters* (letters) on paper. No longer denied its primary scriptural function, a name consequently becomes a signifier in its own right.
- 18 From the hissing to shuffling of a mere "letter," finally, Carver has also managed to engage the reader in a signifying process that began with what Merleau-Ponty calls "l'effrayante naissance de la vocifération" (190)—the writer's first "tinker[ing]" or "mess [ing] around with" sounds. Once transposed to the graphic or scriptural level, such phonemic play begins to pulsate with signifying possibilities, as Carver himself tells us: "Often times a writer doesn't know what he's going to say until he sees what he said" (Pope 14).
- 19 Having thus 'solved' the 'mystery' of the free-floating name in the metafictional under-text of what is a double story, there remains that of Mrs. Slater's whereabouts, as well as her connection to a man who never explicitly denies being Mr. Slater even as he explicitly affirms that "Mrs. Slater doesn't live here." The latter statement, in fact, is in itself implicit of knowledge of a person he names, for had the Mrs. Slater in question been unknown to him, he would have presumably answered with a more categorical 'There is no Mrs. Slater here.' His curiosity, moreover, to know "What'd she win?" only strengthens a possible link, as does his implied knowledge of her "signature" or writing *character* when Bell shows him the card she filled out:  
But look at the signature. Is that Mrs. Slater's signature or not?  
I looked at the card. I held it up to the light. I turned it over, but the other side was blank. So what? I said.
- 20 "So what" [...if it is, we complete], shows him being on the defensive, as if he were undergoing a police interrogation in which questions are eluded or left unanswered, as is the one concerning Mrs. Slater's address: "Mrs. Slater, he read. Two-fifty-five South Sixth East?" The presumed husband does not acknowledge the address as being Mrs. Slater's any more than he can deny it as being his own, for it is the address at which Bell found him. He dodges the above question, in other words, as he does the one concerning his name. In both instances, moreover, we are surprised that the salesman does not pursue the interrogation but performs his demonstration in the absence of any acknowledgement of either name or address.
- 21 The above inconsistency is obliterated, once again, in the sub-text where Bell is demonstrating the mechanics of a literary process rather than of a household appliance. There, knowing where his function stops and the writer's begins, he makes no incursions

into the territory of the latter, whose evasive answers serve, this time, to unfix the realistic notion of *place*. By leaving it as indeterminate as his name, it also becomes a signifier of a more pervasive and unlocalized *presence*. For if "Mrs. Slater does not live here" in the mimetic space of this narrative, she is no less present as the "winner" of the free vacuuming, no less pivotal in determining the 'action of the story': had she not "filled out a card" that won, Mr. S-later would not have been host to a mentor who initiates him to the 'ritual' of collecting narrative matter. Her function is crucial, therefore, in the writer's (and the story's) becoming, itself contingent on knowing the phase<sup>8</sup> that he is in at present.

- 22 In serving that function, furthermore, she constitutes a powerful force within him, compelling him to give her voice or "speak for her," as Bell inadvertently discloses to the reader when he asks: "Are you speaking for Mrs. Slater? he hissed." Anxious to keep the 'mystery' of a 'detective story' on the mimetic surface, Bell immediately regrets his question and adds: "No, no, forget I said that, forget I said that." By wishing to delete his words from S-later's memory, however, he has only made the reader *regard*<sup>9</sup> them more fixedly, suspicious of what Bell wishes to hide or have him (and us) "forget": that S-later can "speak for" a person who may "not live here" in the visible surface of the narrative but who can "live" in or inhabit the writer himself. Her presence in the undertext of his double story thus doubles his voice once more: his/hers, male/female forces coupling in an oppositional "match" ("The Train") or complementary dyad whose masculine and feminine signifiers (Mr./Mrs.) are brought to the fore by the differential 's' as they can simultaneously be permuted in the process of shifting it: Mr-SSSlater or Mrsss-later.

- 23 The above complementary binarity coincides, furthermore, with an equally divided story. For if she has a *name*, he has a *place* in the mimetic text or "here"; if his function of writing is being suspended until later, that of collecting (hers) is highly activated ("winner"); if her side of the "card [is] filled out," his is "blank" or a clean *slate*. In their oscillating movement toward unicity or whole-ness lies the matrix of the story. By extension, a lacuna in the narrative's mimetic linearity must be 'cross-stitched' with "material" from its hypo-mimetic territory if the whole is to cohere. Lacking such binarity, we may add, the story is bereft of the "tension" required of all stories according to Carver:

There has to be tension, a sense that something is imminent, that certain things are in relentless motion, or else, most often, there simply won't be a story. What creates tension in a piece of fiction is partly the way the concrete words are linked together to make up the visible action of the story. But it's also the things that are left out, that are implied, the landscape just under the smooth (but sometimes broken and unsettled) surface of things. (*Fires* 17)

- 24 Sustaining the "relentless motion" in "Collectors" also hinges on the opposition of forces forever criss-crossing and interlocking with one another: explicit/implicit, active/passive, masculine/feminine, presence/absence. It is a "motion," therefore, that perpetually shuffles and shifts the poles constituting the above categories. Thus, if 'feminine' traditionally couples with 'passive,' Mrs. Slater's collecting function is the only *active* one in our story. In contrast, suspending until later the 'male' act of writing as *χαράττειν*—inscribing the first letter with the phallic pen—disactivates it temporarily, rendering it 'passive.'
- 25 The above dialogic play between male and female functions is not unique to "Collectors" or to the sequence of stories considered in these lines. It was in the female narrator's



"middle," we recall, that the new paradigmatically "fat" fiction was 'conceived' in the first story of *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*: "I put my hand on my middle and wonder what would happen if I had children and one of them turned out to look like that, so fat." In the same story, the activity of the husband, Rudy, is reduced to a minimum or to the merely rudi-mentary mimetic ordering of material which his name suggests.<sup>10</sup>

- 26 A somewhat similar bearing function may be attributed to the female in "The Student's Wife" immediately following "What Do You Do in San Francisco" but whose allusion to Rilke in the opening line connects it with "Collectors": "He had been reading to her from Rilke, a poet he admired, when she fell asleep with her head on his pillow." The wife will wake up, however, and complain of implausible "growing pains": "Didn't you ever feel yourself growing?" she asks her husband.<sup>11</sup> The question makes more sense if seen as referring to the maturation of the narrative forces she embodies rather than to a physical body of an adult who, we know, has ceased "growing."
- 27 Process can also come to a standstill, as it does in "Preservation," where the menace of total sterility hangs over a husband who has been "canned" and is paralysed by the fear of becoming utterly "terminated" in his sub-mimetic function as a writer. As he lies on the sofa all day, the working wife, by being the only one active, threatens to annihilate his function altogether and, consequently, the polarity they form. Will the couple manage to 'preserve' and ultimately re-energize the dialogic forces between them or will they ossify as did the man they read about in a magazine who "had been discovered after spending two thousand years in a peat bog in the Netherlands"?
- 28 In the dialogic exchange between the two opposites, finally, the female is not always positively associated with fecundity, tenacity, or productivity. In "What Do You Do in San Francisco?" Marston's wife is a negative force according to the postman and narrator of the story: "I'm convinced that was partly the trouble with the young man who lived here—his not working... The woman encouraged it." It is also implied that she is the cause of the devastation of the house (of fiction) they share: "Of course, it wasn't a model home to begin with, but after they'd been there a while the weeds sprouted up and what grass there was yellowed and died. You hate to see something like that." Failing to energize the creative forces within "the both of them," she will ultimately go away one day, leaving Marston in anxious anticipation of the first "letter" she will ultimately send. When the "letter" does arrive, its impact on him is demolishing rather than salutary for the writing activity he is desperate to begin:
- 'Morning,' I said, offering the letter.  
He took it from me without a word and went absolutely pale. He tottered a minute and then started back for the house, holding the letter up to the light.  
I called out, 'She's no good, boy. I could tell that the minute I saw her. Why don't you go to work and forget her? What have you got against work? It was work, day and night, work that gave me oblivion *when I was in your shoes* and there was a war on where I was...' (emphasis added)
- 29 If the italicised phrase of the above story anticipates the title of "Put Yourself In My Shoes" two stories later, it also joins them oppositionally, for constructive once again, or maieutic, will become Paula's function in the latter, when she calls up her husband and makes him switch off his vacuum cleaner to "listen" to her. Her exhortation to "put the vacuum cleaner away" and meet her at Voyle's is a "signal"<sup>12</sup> ("Signals") that the collecting phase which began earlier has come to an end, that Myers is the *later* version of S-later and that the story whose parts were gestating or coalescing in the preceding narratives is about to unveil itself.<sup>13</sup> One phase has thus given way to another, the forces



required of collecting have yielded to those of writing, and the collector's function is about to swerve to that of *scriptor*. As S-later had said when Bell was leaving his house, the vacuum cleaner can only "be in the way" now that it has done its job—of collecting *and* connecting his story with that of Myers.<sup>14</sup>

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## NOTES

1. When a word swerves from its function in the verbal sequence of a story so as to also point to Carver's reflection on the mechanics of his fiction, the title of a story in which that word occurs more persistently than others will be given in parenthesis throughout this study.

2. The word is used self-reflexively in "So Much Water Close to Home" when the female narrator says: "There is a connection to be made of these things, these events, these faces, if I can find it. My head aches with the effort to find it."

3. In "The Compartment," whose protagonist is also called Myers, the above connections are represented by a "maze" of interconnecting "tracks": "[Myers] moved to the window. But all he could see was an intricate system of tracks where trains were being made up, cars taken off or switched from one train to another."

4. An uncanny familiarity is also manifest in the following:

Do I feel hot to you? [Bell] said. I don't know, I think I might have a fever... You have any aspirin? What's the matter with you? I said. I hope you're not getting sick *on me* (emphasis added).

5. Such semantic dissonances can be seen as the "ungrammaticalities" which for Michael Riffaterre "are simply the mimetic face of the semiotic grammaticality" (11).

6. The word is used self-reflexively in "How About This?" by another writer regarding a series of old license plates in an old barn which he contemplates as a possible working place for his creative activity: "He examined briefly the old license plates nailed to the door. Green, yellow, white plates from the state of Washington, rusted now, 1922-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-34-36-37-40-41-1949; he studied the dates as if he thought their sequence might disclose a code."

7. In the story "Blackbird Pie," which Harold Schweizer sees as "a critique, replete with irony and a good deal of humor, of the realist narrative genre" and as "finally amount[ing] to a major retraction of what has been critically assumed as Carver's realism", "letter" is convincingly shown to "mean[s] both epistle and typographical character" (60).

8. As used here, 'phase' is not a vague synonym for a mere lapse of time but one that conforms to Valéry's following definition in the *Cahiers*:

*J'appelle phase—une durée pendant laquelle l'individu peut être représenté comme fait de n fonctions (ou régions cycliques) indépendantes.*

*Ainsi le sommeil—la réflexion—la digestion—l'exercice—la volition—la colère sont des phases pendant lesquelles certaines fonctions sont suspendues—d'autres agissantes et ces dernières liées momentanément entre elles.*

"I call 'phase'—a period during which the individual can be represented as constituted by *n* independent functions (or cyclical regions).

Thus sleep—reflection—digestion—exercise—volition—anger are phases during which certain functions are suspended—others, acting, and momentarily interconnected between them." (I 891, my translation)

9. For a closer look at Carver's use of "regard" see V. Fachard, "Regarding the Ear in Raymond Carver's 'Vitamins'" in *Journal of the Short Story in English* (37), Autumn 2001, 97-120.
10. For a metafictional reading of the above story see V. Fachard, "What More Than Rita Can We Make of Carver's Parts in 'Fat'?" in *Journal of the Short Story in English* (33), Autumn 1999, 25-48.
11. The question sounds more like a Carver title than the actual "The Student's Wife." The title Carver chose, however, invokes Hemingway's "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife," a story which also brings into play the male and female forces the young Nick must select from or come to terms with in the forging of his manhood.
12. The vacuum cleaner in the opening sentence of "Put Yourself" is not the only object that connects the temporally fractured writer of the two stories. "The telephone [that] rang while he was running the vacuum cleaner" is yet another if, as Claudine Verley has pointed out, Bell's name in the earlier story can suggest both the sound of the "bell and the telephone invented by Alexander Graham Bell" (*Short Cuts* 103). To the American ear of Carver's time, we may add, the association of the name with the invention knows a shorter circuit: Bell Telephone [Company]. If in "Collectors," consequently, the "telephone" was absent or merely 'voci-ferated' *sotto voce* by the reader, in "Put Yourself" the situation is reversed: the "blank" ("but the other side [of the card] was blank") now waiting to be filled is "Bell." It does not take the same reader long to see the incipit of "Put Yourself"—and also of this study—as a rebus that can be re-written as follows: "[Bell] rang while he was running the vacuum cleaner." Permuting the *name* (explicit in "Collectors") with the *invention* (explicit only in "Put Yourself") is the kind of verbal cross-stitching or "tinker[ing]" which Carver's granulated narratives incite the reader to engage in. Hidden in the omission of his name, therefore, it may be the one-time mentor who is now "speaking for" Paula, *he* who is behind the "signal" for the story to begin. If so, we may say that S-later is about to pick up the "letter" that once "dropped in the slot," the one that Bell had "folded... in half" and left his host's house with, promising to "see to it."
13. Emergence as a process of unveiling is graphically encrypted in the etymology of "Voyles," an old French spelling for the word 'veil[e]s'. As the story dramatises the confrontation of a writer and a professor of literature clinging to the tenets of realism which Myers subverts one by one, the "Voyles" or veils introduced in the beginning will also act as the proscenium or curtain which is progressively lifted so as to reveal the acts of deconstruction that take place. The reader, in other words, has been turned into a spectator regarding all that goes on behind the scene—\*\*\*\*\*—veil. Once again, the swerve from the mimetic to the signifying sub-text is effectuated through the shuffling of a single letter: no longer 's' but 'y'.
14. The above study constitutes the first part of a work in progress which attempts to show « Put Yourself In My Shoes » as the story in which Carver dislodges himself from Tolstoyan realism, dismantling the monument of "the old masters" to pieces he simultaneously disposes toward the construction of a new fiction.

## ABSTRACTS

Le présent article s'efforce de montrer que les écarts sémantiques dans la nouvelle "Collectors" de Raymond Carver signalent un sous-texte qui situe l'écrivain dans le temps, et plus précisément, dans la phase du récit qui précède l'acte d'écrire. Ainsi, le vendeur d'aspirateurs nommé Bell, qui persiste à diriger son appareil vers tous les coins de la maison du narrateur sans jamais avoir la confirmation que ce dernier est le mari de Mrs. Slater, la gagnante de la

démonstration gratuite, a une autre fonction dans l'espace souterrain du texte : celle de mentor du présumé Slater, narrateur et auteur implicite, qu'il initie à cette phase par le biais de l'aspirateur, métonymique du recueil ("collecting") de matériel ("material") pour une future histoire. Pendant le déroulement de cette phase, Bell doit veiller à ce que l'acte d'écrire soit suspendu, voire différé. Ainsi, il empêche l'écrivain de ramasser une lettre (épître) tombée par la fente ("slot") de la porte, mais qui est aussi, dans le sous-texte, la première lettre (alphabétique) d'une histoire à venir qu'il doit remettre à plus tard ('later'). Le choix du nom S-later, jamais nié ni confirmé par l'auteur implicite, s'inscrit lui aussi, dans ce jeu de lettres ; il attire ainsi le regard du lecteur sur sa fonction temporelle dans la nouvelle, et non sur une identité mimétique fixe répondant aux exigences du récit réaliste.

## AUTHORS

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Vasiliki Fachard has taught French language and literature at the State University of New York at Albany (1970-1980). She is currently teaching English at the Gymnase Auguste Piccard in Lausanne, Switzerland. She has also given courses on American theater and the fiction of Raymond Carver at the Université Populaire of Lausanne. Two of her previous articles on Carver appeared in this review and are part of a broader study of Narrative in Carver, a book that she is currently working on.